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## Japanese American Shadows in the Trans-national Construction(s) of Atomic Memory

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**Summary** The closing of World War II provoked new questions regarding ethnic belonging and identity for Japanese Americans. In this article, ruptures around race, ownership and geography in the politics of remembering the atomic bomb are explored through a description of the specific narratives constructed by Japan and the US, and 1945 Nikkei reactions to the Atomic bombing. Through this examination, the role of discourse in the formation of private and public memory is clarified, as is the relationship between local, national, and trans-national memory.

### Introduction

Early Japanese American History is increasingly being conceptualized within trans-national frames and locations. In many ways it is a history of border ambiguity and crossings. In this essay I examine the discourse construction of atomic memory in Japan and the United States calling attention to stories of Japanese Americans that fall in between and cause fissures in these borders of thinking.

It is estimated that in 1941, 30,000 American born Nikkei were temporarily residing in Japan.<sup>1)</sup> This is a significant number considering that in that same year only 80,000 Nisei were estimated to be living on the US mainland and a far smaller number in Hawai'i.<sup>2)</sup> Of those, upwards of 4,800 were living in Hiroshima and an unknown number were living in Nagasaki. During this time tensions between the US and Japan had been building up to Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war. In August of 1941, passage from Japan back to the US was suspended and many of those Nikkei found themselves 'trapped' in Japan. A great number of those temporarily residing in Hiroshima and

Nagasaki perished, but it is estimated that upwards of 1,000 survived and repatriated to the United States. Furthermore, tracing early Japanese American immigration history reveals that a disproportionate number of early Japanese immigrants to the United State emigrated from Hiroshima prefecture.<sup>3)</sup> According to a 1960 census by the Japanese Consulate in Honolulu roughly a quarter of the Nikkei living in Hawaii came from Hiroshima.<sup>4)</sup> Thus, many Japanese Americans had immediate family living in or close relational ties to Hiroshima during the time of the bombing, leading me to suggest that agency, erasures, appropriation and commodification in the discourse surrounding stories of the atomic bomb have far greater implications for Japanese American history and identity than previously explored or understood.

Japanese Americans' positionality leading up to and during World War II regarding their relationship(s) to both the United States as the land of their birth and to Japan as the land of their ancestors placed them in a difficult position throughout the war,<sup>5)</sup> with their loyalty constantly called into question.<sup>6)</sup> Historically, citizenship and rights were not guaranteed to Japanese.

Pre-war immigration policy provides one lens for situating historical subjectivity and racial tensions concerning Japanese Americans. The 1907-1908 Gentleman's Agreement curbed emigration from Japan, California's Alien Land Law Passed in 1913 prohibited (primarily) Chinese and Japanese "aliens" from owning land, and the immigration act of 1917 restricted Asian immigration into the United States. Juxtaposed against these laws, there emerged a growing permanent settlement, leading to the buildup of an ethnic enclave and the creation of Japanese American institutions such as schools, places of worship, and a Nikkei press. In 1922 in *Ozawa v. the United States* the Supreme Court ruled that Japanese immigrants were ineligible for citizenship/naturalization rights, and in the same year the passing of the Cable Act effected that any "American" woman who married an "Asian" would lose her citizenship. Finally, the 1924 Oriental Exclusion Act combined with the formula used in the 1924 National Origins Act barred all Asian immigration.<sup>7)</sup> In addition to these laws, during World War II, mainland folks of Japanese ancestry were incarcerated as a group, without trial, and without regard for their individual civil rights.<sup>8)</sup> In 1943, the federal government created a racially segregated U. S. Army unit for Japanese Americans and subjected residents in the camps to a loyalty questionnaire. Question 27 and 28 of the questionnaire became the main focus of concern. One of the questions asked if the respondent was willing to serve in the US armed forces in combat duty<sup>9)</sup>, and the other asked :

Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese Emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?<sup>10)</sup>

Christian Heimburger describes well the irony of these

questions, "one asked citizens who had been forcibly imprisoned to serve their country in combat, and the other had the potential to render the "alien" Issei effectively stateless."<sup>11)</sup> Most "no-no" respondents were separated and moved to the Tule Lake camp, and some were even deported, while most "yes-yes" respondents were allowed to leave the camps.

The postwar *myths of the war experience*<sup>12)</sup> only added to the marginalization of the Japanese American experience. Furthermore, as I intend to argue, because the story of the atomic bomb has never been properly placed in the canon of Japanese American history it continues to cast a shadow on Japanese American identity. Foucault's widely explored theories on the presence of power in discourse formation are useful in understanding the multiple subjectivities of Japanese Americans in remembering the bomb. Foucault explains that :

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say ; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is re-quired in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.<sup>13)</sup>

In reflecting on the production of narratives equating the dropping of the bomb with peace, the saving of lives and the end of the war, it becomes apparent how the agency for remembering the bomb in Japanese America was obscured in historical, political and racial ways. Mainland Nikkei had experienced imprisonment in concentration camps for their contested loyalty based on their Japanese heritage. They also experienced what I would like to call a symbolic loss of homeland with the atomic bombing of Japan. Therefore it becomes necessary to analyze the divergent narratives and to trace their continuities and

discontinuities in the Japanese American memory of the atomic bomb.

### Atomic Bomb=Peace=Anti-war: Tracing the Peace Industry and the Japanese Mythology

Yoshikuni Igarashi has argued that Japan was able to survive its WWII defeat by “reinventing itself as a peaceful nation,”<sup>14)</sup> an idea that has been advanced by other scholars who have demonstrated how Japanese post-war modernity is linked to the construction of a narrative of Japanese collective national victimhood. Lisa Yoneyama, for example, demonstrates how Japan’s war crimes become invisible behind its status of being the “only atom-bombed nation” in the world.<sup>15)</sup> Kyoko Doi has called the discourse on Hiroshima (in Japan \*emphasis added) formulaic, “Hiroshima=atomic bomb=peace=antiwar,”<sup>16)</sup> and argues that it has been strategically produced, distributed, and consumed.

The formula described by Doi is useful in critiquing the evolution and universalization of nuclear politics specific to Hiroshima. Doi explains that this formula was not a natural conclusion reached in the aftermath of nuclear devastation, but rather a calculated strategy of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law.<sup>17)</sup> Enacted in 1949, on the fourth anniversary of the atomic bombing, the law’s first article establishes its aim to be: “the construction of the city of Hiroshima as a peace memorial city to symbolize the human ideal of sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace.”<sup>18)</sup> Under this law reconstruction projects that were mired by Hiroshima’s financial scarcity received preferential assistance from the Japanese national government, specifically Hiroshima was granted money and property previously belonging to the military.<sup>19)</sup> Doi argues that “peace was not accompanied by a noble aim, but rather it was a slogan used to get funding for post-war reconstruction of the city.”<sup>20)</sup>

This commodification has had several unfortunate consequences of concern to the critical politics for the nation. On the one hand, as Yoneyama, Doi and others

point out, this commodification of peace in the Hiroshima story has functioned to hide the reality of the pre-war Japanese empire, its colonial practices and consequences. John Dower deduced that “Hiroshima and Nagasaki became icons of Japanese suffering-perverse national treasures, of a sort, capable of fixing Japanese memory of the war on what had happened to Japan and simultaneously blotting out recollection of the Japanese victimization of others.”<sup>21)</sup> In particular the treatment of Koreans<sup>22)</sup> and “comfort women”<sup>23)</sup> has been a major focus of contention in debates bound by the victim-perpetrator binary of the official Japanese peace narrative. Japan’s refusal to apologize or take full responsibility for its war crimes continues to be a subject of contemporary political contention in the country. And on the other hand, the critical politics in the work of Japanese peace/anti-war/anti-imperial movement (s) and their history has been quite unfortunately obfuscated and distorted by government manipulation in the production of the national master narrative and the development of what could be dubbed as a “Peace Industrial Complex.”

### Atomic Nationalism: Zaigai (Foreign) Hibakusha Excluded from Memory

According to the inscription of the Korean Victims Memorial at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, there were approximately 100,000 Korean citizens, soldiers, civilian employees of the Japanese army, and mobilized students living in Hiroshima by the end of World War II. It states that of the approximately 200,000 lives taken by the atomic bomb, an estimated ten percent were Korean.<sup>24)</sup> Lisa Yoneyama’s critical discussion regarding Korean hibakusha brings into focus the ethnic nationalism in Hiroshima’s narrative. It calls attention to a vagueness in the estimates of Korean atomic bomb casualties, ranging from five to fifty thousand, which she says is “evidence that the bomb’s impact on the racially and ethnically minoritized population has been considerably neglected.”<sup>25)</sup> Yoneyama also demonstrates how the Korean

Hibakusha Memorial erected in 1970, and the different controversies that it has embodied have served as an important space for disrupting the purity of a “Japanese” victimhood in the Hiroshima memory. The inscription on the plaque remembering Korean victims mentioned above is perhaps the most succinct summary for understanding the socio-historical politics concerning Korean ethnicity in Japan and the atomic bomb so I’d like to print the rest here. It reads :

The Korean victims were given no funeral or memorial services, and their spirits hovered for years unable to pass onto heaven. Then on April 10, 1970, the prefectural Branch of the Organization of Korean Residents in Japan erected this memorial in this corner of Hiroshima, the city of Peace. This memorial was erected in the hope that the souls of our compatriots, brought to misery through forces, will be able to rest in peace. It is also an expression of our demand than the A-bomb tragedy will never be repeated.

We pray, of course, for the solace of these lost souls longing for their homelands, but killed on foreign soil. However, we also pray that the plight of Korean survivors, poorly understood even today, will emerge into public awareness and that reasonable assistance for these survivors will be provided immediately. A Memorial service for the Korean victims of the bomb is held here every year on August fifth.<sup>26)</sup>

Yoneyama limits her discussion regarding hibakusha of non-Japanese citizenship to Koreans in Japan. Unfortunately, by failing to acknowledge the existence of Japanese American, Japanese Brazilian, Taiwanese, and other hibakusha she misses an important opportunity to deepen her critique regarding race, nation, and citizenship within the Hiroshima narrative.

In her biographical work investigating the life of Japanese American artist Isamu Noguchi, Masayo Duus<sup>27)</sup> details a controversy beginning in 1951 when Noguchi was invited to visit Hiroshima by Kenzo

Tange, a prominent Japanese architect commissioned to design the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Tange had intended for Noguchi to design the park’s central cenotaph that would house the names of the hibakusha. Following a meeting with Tange and the then Hiroshima Mayor Hamai, Noguchi eagerly volunteered for the project. After laborious deliberation concerning the symbolism as well as ongoing consultation with Tange, he completed his design in March of the following year. Shortly thereafter, however, Noguchi received notice from the mayor that his design had been rejected. According to an article put out by Peace Seeds in collaboration with Hiroshima’s *Chugoku* newspaper, “the committee charged with the reconstruction plans for the city opposed Mr. Noguchi’s participation.”<sup>28)</sup> The City Construction Committee however did not hesitate to approve a design that Tange put together in a hasty four days. In a letter written to his friend John Collier, Noguchi describes his bewilderment at the sudden and unexpected rejection. The only explanation Tange could offer as to why it had been rejected was “perhaps because I (Noguchi) was an American.” Commenting on this Noguchi writes, “It was my one most disagreeable experience in Japan.”<sup>29)</sup>

Noguchi’s story corroborates Doi’s critique on the nationalisms in Hiroshima discourse. Just as Noguchi’s design for the cenotaph was rejected and politically excluded from the memory of the bomb, so too have been Japanese American, Brazilian, Korean, and Taiwanese hibakusha,<sup>30)</sup> with material implications much more insidious to the health and socio-political lives of its sufferers than a rejection of their art work.

The exclusion of Koreans, Nikkei, and other so-called foreigners in Hiroshima’s commemorative space allows for a distortion of history; it is what sanctions the nationalistic myth of Japan=victim. Although Japan exploited this frame for its own benefit, in the global arena it must also be understood within the context of orientalist racism. Andrea Smith’s development of Said’s logic of orientalism and its pairing with

the anchor of war is particularly applicable here because of the important ways it connects race, gender and war.<sup>31)</sup> Under an essentialist logic, Japan's image shifts overnight from one of empiric and brutal aggressor to that of the occupied weak. This orientalist logic is clearly present in the image of Japan represented in American newspapers following the dropping of the atomic bomb and Japan's subsequent surrender, in which a "short occupation of Japan is predicted" on the grounds of the Japanese people being "co-operative" "friendly" "very helpful" and well "disciplined."<sup>32)</sup> In this way, Japan's misogynist and criminal violence against women during the war is easily eschewed under the orientalist logic in which Japan itself is feminized and castrated of its aggressor image.

Japan's nationalism was not erased, forgiven and then forgotten, its imperialism was given a colonial amnesiac veil for its defeat in the war, the subsequent US-Japan Cold War alliance and security treaties. Yoneyama exposes one particular disturbing example of how Japan's imperialism was reappropriated for the neo-national Peace Industrial Complex, she details how Tange's design for the Hiroshima Peace Park is actually a modified version of a design previously intended to celebrate the Japanese empire articulated in the concept of "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity."<sup>33)</sup>

#### Atomic Bomb=Saved Lives=End War : Tracing the American Mythology

If the formula for remembering in Japan has been Atomic Bomb=Peace=Anti-war, and imparts a myth of national victimhood, then the formula in the United States could be written as Atomic Bomb=Saved Lives=End War and propagates an image of national heroism. Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell argue that in order to justify the unprecedented deaths and injuries of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians resulting from the bombings, the atomic bomb in the American narrative had to be "understood as a reflection of dominant military power and at the same

time consistent with American decency and concern for human life."<sup>34)</sup> Thus, work setting the stage for the official narrative of the bomb was tediously crafted and begun many months prior to the act of dropping the bomb, the bulk of its shape owed to Leslie R. Groves, director of the Manhattan Project, and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson.<sup>35)</sup>

In fact, the entire story of the atomic bomb told from America appeared to unfold like a well-rehearsed theatre production featuring some of America's best actors. Notably, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist William L. Laurence, handpicked by Groves, becomes the unofficial mouth of the War Department. Laurence's articles glorify the science of the bomb and atomic energy<sup>36)</sup> and they saturated the American Press. Lifton and Mitchell argue that the Hiroshima narrative was written over the absolute "suppression of evidence (including articles, photographs, and film footage) that showed the human consequences of the Hiroshima bomb," "shielding Americans both from the human effects of the bomb and its implications for the future."<sup>37)</sup> They argue that it is through the strategic execution of propaganda and concealment that President Truman's justification: "We saved a half a million American lives" became indoctrinated into American culture and memory.

Under this policy of suppression, a strict censorship and media dictatorship regarding the bomb was enforced; almost all information regarding the bomb in the American press had been generated by the War Department. Although some descriptions of the destruction did manage to sneak into American national view from time to time, for example when some media channels picked up on a Tokyo radio broadcast that referred to Hiroshima as "a city of the dead" describing the victims as "bloated and scorched-such an awesome sight-their legs and bodies stripped of clothes and burned with a huge blister..." Such reports, however, were quickly countered and discounted as Japanese war propaganda.<sup>38)</sup> Following the war's end, foreign correspondents were not allowed to enter Hiroshima or Nagasaki, much less report on their

nuclear devastation. Japanese newspapers also were required to submit material to a censorship board for review before it could be published.<sup>39)</sup> Scientists as well were required to submit their findings to the censorship board for review. This censorship, combined with myths dispersed by the war department was necessary, not only as a justification of the use of the bomb, but also as an offensive strategy to curb fears about the danger of radiation in America.

In fact, the American public in general and quite a number of specific populations in particular had much cause to be alarmed about the danger of radiation. In the 1980's, it was estimated that one million Americans had been exposed to high levels of radiation through nuclear explosions or fallout. Significantly, native populations have been disproportionately affected by the nuclear industries extractive practices. Diana Ortiz of the Indian Health and Radiation Project in New Mexico said that "much of the uranium mined in the U.S is found on or near Indian land where native miners have died of cancer or are suffering from radiation -related illnesses."<sup>40)</sup> The American narrative, when deconstructed in this way is a grotesque example of the fundamental strategies employed in the logics outlined by Andrea Smith in her important essay: "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy."<sup>41)</sup>

### The Hiroshima Maidens

The Hiroshima Maidens were a group of twenty-five young, Japanese female hibakusha brought to the United States in 1955 to undergo reconstructive surgery for injuries and mutilations incurred as a result of the US bombing of Hiroshima.<sup>42)</sup> Rodney Barker's book, *Hiroshima Maidens*, chronicles many of the details of the Hiroshima Maidens Project illuminating its evolution into an American mission. Although it traces important characters and important developments in its historiography, Barker's account, regrettably, also becomes accomplice to the gendered paternalism at the core of the project. Conversely, it is

precisely the naïve paternalism that makes Barker's book an invaluable tool for examining the discursive practices of postwar America.

The introductory descriptor of the hibakusha in Barker's book is just one of many red flags that appear. Barker's tale originates with a Japanese Methodist minister, Kiyoshi Tanimoto, expressing feelings of remorse for his inability to help "his girls":

The thinly clad, young schoolgirls were the unluckiest. In a fraction of a second their lives took a tragic turn. Many had witnessed the atomic flash with their faces lifted, and the intense heat charred exposed flesh and left scars that wrenched their facial features into grotesquely symbolic expressions. One could not smile because the contractions tugged her lips over her teeth into a permanent snarl. Another had her right eyelid seared away; unprotected, the eye watered steadily as though possessed with a grief of its very own.<sup>43)</sup>

Barker's tragically poetic, even pornographic objectification of the hibakusha sets the tone for the subjugation of all that is Japanese in service of American diplomatic orientalist imagery, or as Caroline Chung Simpson put it "the logic of US masculinized domination of the feminized east."<sup>44)</sup> Simpson unpacks the oriental and sexual logics attached to the Hiroshima Maidens Project in the service of a hetero-normative 1950's white citizenship obsessed with domesticity.<sup>45)</sup> By arguing that the Hiroshima Maidens Project offered a narrative in which "the white American mother and the idealized American home she produced were portrayed as the solutions both to the problem of damaged femininity and to the lingering ethical doubts about American democracy caused by the devastating effects of the atomic bombs,"<sup>46)</sup> Simpson highlights the orientalist logics strategically used to enhance the heroism, moral and intellectual dominance of America by focusing attention on the philanthropy and goodness of the



white-hetero citizens in gendered ways.

In addition to this sexual and exotic “other”ing of the hibakusha, Barker’s book is host to a slew of other orientalist logics complicit with America’s bomb myth. Throughout the book Japan was constructed, however unintentionally, as intellectually and morally inferior. Barker’s explanation that after several years of campaigning and plastic surgeries inside of Japan, it was decided that the only hope for the project was to move it to the United States because it was believed that the medical advancement of America was the only thing that might be able to ameliorate the suffering of the hibakusha. Turning the Hiroshima Maidens Project into an American mission was also used to highlight the magnanimity of America in comparison to Japan.

The saga of the Reverend Tanimoto’s struggle to obtain medical help for his group of girls from within the community of Hiroshima is a shameful episode of neglect. . . . When he approached public officials, he found that they were so intent on establishing a new identity for Hiroshima as a “Peace City” and placing it on the world map, that they were more interested in constructing monuments and memorials to the dead than in helping the suffering of thousands who still lived.<sup>47)</sup>

The Hiroshima Maiden’s Project, in this way gave new structure to America’s mythology. In this reading of history, it seems that Japan and not the US was responsible for the suffering resulting from the atomic bomb and the project came to symbolize American generosity and friendship.

The story of disfigured young Japanese women willingly rehabilitated by white American families did much both to ameliorate Americans’ guilt about the use of the bomb and to enshrine further the 1950’s American home as a model of comfort and security available to all.<sup>48)</sup>

An important observation made by Japanese American feminist scholars is the instrumental role that two Japanese American women, Helen Yokoyama and Mary (Yuri) Kochiyama played in the successes of the Hiroshima Maidens Project. Simpson for example notes that the coordinating work and bilingual skills of Yokoyama and Kochiyama were absolutely vital to the functions of the project. Their role, however, has been all but written out of a history preferring to cast its characters as *white mothers* and *Japanese daughters*.<sup>49)</sup>

### Bridging Myths

In applying Bruce Lincoln’s discussion on the central role of force in discourse, it is possible to conclude that the forces are being applied in the same general direction. In both cases, strategic practices, operating within an orientalist framework, of remembering and forgetting the atomic bomb have been essential to the postwar articulation of United States and Japanese exceptionalism, while distracting from the all too onerous realities. Essentially, equating the bomb with peace and with the saving of lives is the same preposterous myth used to justify two different stories. The reality of the bomb is that it killed people and destroyed lives. I do not debate whether the dropping of the bomb was ethical or not, but to have an event which devastated two cities and took the lives of hundreds of thousands of non-combatants be remembered as leading to world peace and saving lives is insulting, particularly when we consider that wars employing nuclear weapons continue to plague global politics.

Lincoln tells us that “Myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal.”<sup>50)</sup> In the construction of these two seemingly separate mythologies, each country is able to present a positive image, one that simultaneously obscured the US-Japan Cold War alliance as well as the contradictory nature of the US nuclear umbrella under Article 9 of Japan’s Constitution.<sup>51)</sup> Reading these two narratives side by



side importantly reveals how history is constructed over multiple borders. Moreover, interrogation of these myths reveals that race is a crucial category for understanding the complexity of the present situation as a product of historical contingencies, echoing Elena Tajima Creef's contention that "repressions of historical memory is never accidental, but often shaped by the culture of racism."<sup>52)</sup> By exposing the logics of white supremacy in the silences written into these myths, it advances both the claim that race is a political category, and as Joel Olsen has argued that American democracy and racial oppression have always been mutually constitutive.<sup>53)</sup>

### Japanese American 1945 perspective on dropping of the Atomic Bomb

In the shadows of the narratives being constructed by the United States and Japan, Japanese Americans held their own unique and complex views on the dropping of the atomic bombs which varied depending on geo-political factors, for example, whether or not they had family in Hiroshima, or if they had served in the military during the time of the bombing, and then of course if they themselves had been in Hiroshima and survived the bombing.<sup>54)</sup> These views on the atomic bomb are not well documented. Mainland Japanese American sentiments regarding the bomb have appeared in some of the literature on Japanese American internment during World War II, but for the most part there remains a critical lack of primary sources providing insight into Japanese American perspectives on the bombings in 1945. Furthermore, as historians such as Brian Hayashi have noted, Japanese Americans were not a homogenous group, but instead "divided by class, immigration status, occupation, prefectural origins regionalism, and gender fissures"<sup>55)</sup> making it even more difficult to generalize about Japanese American responses to the atomic bomb. Individual responses themselves were, in fact complicated. For example Mary Matsuda Gruenwald in her book *Looking like the Enemy* wrote :

When I saw the pictures of Japanese people burned and charred by the atomic blast, I was heartbroken for them. I was an American by birth, but at that moment, I was Japanese. . . My tears were a mix of relief and anguish. Even though part of me was glad the United States won the war, the Japanese part of me was speechless with grief and horror.<sup>56)</sup>

Michi Nishiura Weglyn in her book *Years of Infamy : The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* writes that, "nearly a third of the Japanese American immigrants incarcerated at Tule Lake had come from Hiroshima." For them news about the atomic bomb was seen as the "final nightmare stage in the sequence of injustices."<sup>57)</sup> "Most Nikkei were shocked and confused, many relieved yet saddened, while some were completely devastated."<sup>58)</sup> One thing that we do know is that many in the camps immediately contacted appointed personnel to find out about the welfare of their family and friends in Hiroshima.<sup>59)</sup> Mitsue Matsui, remembering the atomic bomb says, "that was devastating, it was a shock. . . it really shocked me. I knew then and there that some of my relatives had died. And they did actually."<sup>60)</sup> Yasashi Ichikawa said, "It was very sad. . . a friend of mine died in Nagasaki. Because of the atomic bomb. She was a school teacher."<sup>61)</sup>

Many Japanese Americans with family members or friends in the atomic-stricken cities did not learn of their fate until months or even years later. A number of them returned to Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the war, and it was only then that the effects of the bomb became tangible.<sup>62)</sup> Kay Matsuoka discusses what it was like for her family receiving news of the bombing of Hiroshima and their reaction :

Well, they didn't know who got killed or anything until after all this passed and the letters started coming. And then we found out that different ones of our relatives, how they had perished in that atom bomb. And 'course, when we went

back in (1967) to visit them for the first time, then our uncle's only daughter, and then like my side, I had one uncle that was an artist, and he was teaching art in school, and they had all perished in this atom bomb.<sup>63)</sup>

Harry Fukuhara served as a colonel in the US Military Intelligence Service during WWII. Fukuhara reflecting back to the time when he heard news of the bombing of Hiroshima says he felt a mixture of "shock and relief." "Shock" because he was from Hiroshima and still had family (his mother and three brothers) living there. "Relief" because Japan's surrender meant that he would not have to participate in a future Allied invasion. After the bombing Fukuhara worried about his family and became extremely depressed, "my thinking degraded to the point that I blamed myself-that they had died because I had volunteered to fight against them."<sup>64)</sup> Fukuhara was able to reunite with his family in Hiroshima; most had survived the initial bombing, however, his brother died within the year of atomic bomb-related injury. Fukuhara, in this memoir, articulates something that I think could be applicable to all Japanese Americans grappling with the memory of the atomic bomb, he says "for years, by virtue of a silent mutual agreement, we avoided talking about what happened to our family in Hiroshima. . . I believe that talking about it now with a purpose, was the medicine I needed."<sup>65)</sup>

### I Come From There : Obliterated Homeland, Temporality in the Japanese Diaspora

The concept of homeland has been a central theme in many studies within the fields of immigration, diaspora and race studies. Gloria Anzaldúa in her poem "Borderlands" expresses well the feeling of living in a unsettled temporality "caught in the crossfire between camps, while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from ; . . . You are at home, a stranger."<sup>66)</sup>

The longing for a return to one's homeland and the

commitment to the maintenance of one's homeland has been generally used to describe some aspects of diasporic experiences.<sup>67)</sup> Wanni Anderson and Robert Lee, in their book *Displacements and Diasporas : Asians in the Americas* contend, "Immigrant communities are affected by both the lived and the imagined notion of 'home.'"<sup>68)</sup> Homeland might be a contested notion with multiple meanings, but I argue that whether recent immigrants, original inhabitants, or individuals who found their settlement in the U. S. somewhere in between, Japanese American subjectivity in the pre-war years was always situated in relation to "home," and this sense of home was heavily burdened by the notion of "loyalty."

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston describes what grappling with the news of the atomic bomb was like for Japanese Americans living inside America's concentration camps. She writes :

All over America people were dancing in the streets. I suppose there was some rejoicing at Manzanar too. At least we were no longer the enemy. But the Atomic bomb if anything just sharpened our worry. . . I still see Papa sitting on our steps for long hours, smoking cigarettes in his ivory holder, staring into the mountains he went to with his eyes whenever he needed sustenance. Here he sat, a man with no prospects, perhaps now without even a family in Japan to confirm his own history. . .<sup>69)</sup>

In Houston's account, it is her father who is the subject of direct connection to the consequence of the atomic bomb, yet this story and the one that follows provides a place to secure the multi-generational significance of the atomic bomb. Kay Matsuo's reflection on her father's response to receiving news about the bomb also advances the argument that pre-war Japanese American history must be understood using a transnational frame, and furthermore, that it is important to question pre-war distinctions in identity

between Japanese Immigrants and Japanese, she writes :

Well, it was word of mouth. We didn't have any radio or anything like that. And at that time my father, [Laughs] he says, "That's just an old rumor." He says, "That can't be." . . . You know this was generally, you know, the *Isseis* still hung on to. They were in America, and they were in camp and everything, but they still had way in the back of their mind they were pulling for Japan, that Japan has never lost a war.<sup>70)</sup>

World War II was a turning point in Japanese American identity for many reasons. Before the war many Japanese Americans maintained close ties to Japan. Many in fact supported Japan's war effort and empire expansion. This point has been clarified by Lon Kurashige who has argued that JACLers [Japanese American Citizens League] did not see severing ties with Japan as a requisite for proving loyalty to the United States. He says :

Despite America's opposition to Japanese imperialism, they sided with their parents, who, like most expatriates, reveled in the military victories of their homeland. The formal declaration of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937 heightened ties to the motherland, as both generations sent money, supplies, and well wishes to Japanese soldiers.<sup>71)</sup>

Furthermore, it has been estimated that 30,000 Japanese-Americans in Japan at the start of the war actually joined the Japanese war effort, hundreds of them even enlisted and fought in the Japanese army.<sup>72)</sup>

Assimilation, "Americanization" and accommodation was frequently a focal point of debate among Nikkei in early Japanese America.<sup>73)</sup> The meaning of "Americanization," functioning as accommodation or as supremacy, has also been a subject of contention. Fuminori Minamikawa, for example, has argued that

an understanding of Nikkei Japanese-ness should not be read as a simple relationship to culture inherited from the homeland. He develops this argument by saying that pre-war "Americanization" was actually a racial project premised on the idea that Japan and Japanese Americans were "civilized," and superior, and thus could become "white" American citizens.<sup>74)</sup> Throughout the early debates about whether Japanese Americans should give up their Japanese-ness to become American, and regardless of the correct interpretation of Nikkei Japanese-ness, I argue that there remained a strong connection to Japan as a homeland. This is evidenced in the transnational flow of people and money back and forth between Japan and America in the pre-war years. 1927 remittances to Hiroshima prefecture alone, amounted to 3,179,518 yen,<sup>75)</sup> a sizable sum when you consider that in 1927 two yen was equal to approximately one US dollar.<sup>76)</sup>

Given Japanese American's strong historical ties to Hiroshima, the dropping of the atomic bomb seems to be an important and yet dramatically underemphasized turning point in Japanese American history. Not only did the dropping of the bomb solidify Japan's defeat, but for those in the concentration camps, especially those who emigrated from Hiroshima, who thought they might return to Japan after the war to escape racist and discriminatory practices in America or who held on to a notion of Japan as homeland, the bomb changed all of that; it arguably severed dreams of returning to a homeland and made assimilation the only viable action.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to clarify the politics and pluralities of atomic bomb memory and repression. By focusing the discussion on silences and shadows in the Japanese and American national narratives, I have tried to illuminate the paradoxes of racism operating on both local and transnational levels in the construction of the atomic myths : Atomic Bomb=Peace=Anti-war constructed in Japan ; and Atomic Bomb=Saved

Lives=End War in America. Employing Japanese American perspectives to interrogate atomic narratives across the Pacific has exposed the orientalism in the construction of the Peace Industrial Complex. It has also raised important questions regarding the significance of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to Japanese American history. In addition to what I have discussed in this article, I believe Japanese American reckoning with the bomb will reveal still other important gaps in our understanding of the subjectivities, moments of inter-ethnic and transnational solidarities, as well as important moments of critical introspection in Japanese American history.

#### NOTES

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## 国境を越えた原爆に関する記憶の構築に見る 日系アメリカ人の歴史に潜む影

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**要旨** 第二次世界大戦の終結は、日系アメリカ人の民族的帰属とアイデンティティに関する新たな疑問を引き起こした。この論文では、日本とアメリカによって構築されてきた特定のナラティブおよび原爆に対する日系人の反応の叙述を通して、原爆の記憶のポリティックスにおける人種、所有権、地政学をめぐる様々な亀裂を検証する。このような考察を経て、地域および国の記憶の間の関係と同様に、私的及び公的な記憶の形成における言説の役割を明確にする。